

528

A
SUMMARY VIEW
O R
Genuine Evidences of the Truth
O F T H E
CHRISTIAN RELIGION:

BEING THE SUBSTANCE OF
TWO DISCOURSES,
Delivered at the Sunday Evening Lectures, at
Horsham, SUSSEX.

By WILLIAM EVERSHED.

Whence, but from heaven, should men unskilled in arts,
In different nations born, in different parts,
Weave such agreeing truths? or how? or why
Should all conspire to cheat us with a lie.
Unasked their pains, ungrateful their advice,
Starving their gains, and martyrdom their price.

DRYDEN.

L O N D O N:
Printed for the AUTHOR, by J. BROWN, Fair Street Horsham
down, and sold by Mr. BUCKLAND, in Pater-noster-row,

MDCCLXXX.

Price One Shilling.

U M W A R Y V I E W

Of the Evidence of the Truth

OF THE

CHRISTIAN RELIGION

BY THE REV. J. W. W. A. R. Y. V. I. E. W.

LONDON: 1842.



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P R E F A C E.

*A*S a great number of learned and ingenious vindications of Christianity have appeared, it is not to be supposed, that these discourses will be more convincing to the adversaries of Revelation, than many others heretofore published, or obviate those objections, with which inveterate prejudices ever cloud the human mind. And those who have thought and read much on this subject, may not perhaps find many new arguments here advanced. But from these discourses, the reader may expect to find a rational discussion, and concise arrangement, of the principal evidences in favour of the truth and divine authority of Christianity, and as such it may tend to confirm and strengthen the faith, and animate the hope of common Christians, in the main principles of revealed Religion, and remove them further from that scepticism and infidelity, which so much abound in the world.

A summary view of the proofs of Revelation, are more level to the capacities, and better adapted to the leisure and circumstances of the common people, than larger works. And as the principles of scepticism, and the seeds of irreligion are espoused and disseminated among the low and giddy, as well as among the more refined and Philosophick, it becomes the more necessary, that common Christians should be furnished with some
plain

~~plain reasons, and rational grounds for that faith,~~
 which they profess to have in the divine mission of Jesus
 Christ. The proofs and evidences for the support of
 this faith, appear to lie in a short compass,—for it
 must be admitted, that either the Evangelists and Apostles
 were divinely inspired, or that they were the greatest
 cheats, and imposters, that ever existed; between these
 two there is no medium.—To prove they were cheats,
 would be a much greater work, and more difficult task,
 than to prove they were men of simplicity and probity.
 —And as the Christian system does not stand upon one
 single argument, testimony or fact; but upon the con-
 current evidence of a vast multitude of circumstances,
 which at least makes the belief of its falsehood, ten
 thousand times more absurd, than the belief of its truth,
 I think a man of common understanding, though he
 be no Philosopher, may be a Christian, upon sufficient
 and rational evidence.—And though, the Infidel may
 question the soundness of the Christian's intellects, and
 announce him to the world as unskilled in the Phæno-
 menæ of nature, and as believing many things to be true,
 that are contrary to custom and experience, yet not-
 withstanding this, I think it may be fairly admitted,
 without supposing a partial fondness to Christianity,
 that the wisdom of a real Christian, consists in being
 governed and guided by the evidence of the greater light,
 instead of the lesser,——and if he be deemed a mere
 trifler and simpleton for this, it will be very difficult
 for the most enlarged understanding, to determine in
 what consists true wisdom.

That

That the several Congregations of Christians, among whom these discourses may happen to fall, and over whom the Author presides as Messenger, may receive some satisfaction in the perusal of them,—that they may contend in the spirit of meekness and love, for the principles, doctrines, and duties of Christianity, and hold the beginning of their confidence firm unto the end, is the prayer of the Editor.

Cuckfield, April 27. 1780.

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S E R M O N, I.

J O H N. VI. xxx.

They said therefore unto him, what sign shewest thou then, that we may see and believe thee? what dost thou work?

WH E N the fulness of time was come that God should send forth his Son, the promised *Messiah*, the Prince and Redeemer of Israel, and Jesus of *Nazareth* appeared in that Character, it was just and reasonable for the people to require some proper credentials of his divine mission, and good evidence that he really was the person he professed himself to be.

When the *Jewish* nation received the law by the hand of *Moses*, they were used to signs, wonders, and miracles, in the land of *Egypt*, and in the Wilderness; and as they were taught by *Moses*, that that Prophet whom the Lord should raise up among them, should be like him, that people had reason to expect that he should shew signs and miracles as

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Moses

Moses did; therefore, when *Jesus* appeared as that Prophet sent from God, the *Jews* had a right to ask what he did to prove the truth of what he professed, what did he work? or what sign did he give, that he was that person and no Impostor. Thus far they acted right and rational; their fault was not, their requiring good evidence, but their not being satisfied with what was abundantly sufficient.

To believe without good and reasonable proof and evidence is credulity; and not to be satisfied with such evidence, is too great a proof of a prejudiced mind and want of candour.

I now proceed to shew, what evidence and rational proof *Jesus of Nazareth* gave that he was the Christ of God.

I. He fulfilled the prophetic character of the *Messiah*.

II. The nature, purity, goodness and excellency of his doctrine was an evidence that he was no Impostor.

III. To this is to be added, his unspotted and exemplary character, shining and divine like his doctrine.

IV. Likewise the powerful testimony, and awakening evidence of miracles.

I. I am

I. I am to observe, that Jesus fulfilled the prophetic character of the Messiah.

Here it is sufficient only to mention, that such a person as *Messiah* the Prince was to come, according to *Moses* and the Prophets, and was therefore the general expectation of the *Jewish* nation: But what we are more particularly concerned with is the several circumstances relative to the character of the *Messiah*, and how they were fulfilled in the person of Jesus. And

1st The time when this *Messiah* the Prince was to appear was pointed out so plain, that the *Jews* looked for him to appear about the time Jesus was born; they knew very well, that the time pointed out by *Daniel* was expiring, *Dan.* ix. 24. and, as Sir *Isaac Newton* and others have observed, that tho' there have been different calculations of the said time by several persons, and in different methods, yet the end will be near that time. Another circumstance pointing out the time was, that this person was to come before all rule and pow'r was departed from *Judah*, *Gen.* xlix. 10. And it is well known all rule and power was not departed from *Judah* for some years after the coming or death of Jesus; but they had an authoritative and an executive power, as appears *John* xviii. 31. *Acts* xxiv. 6, 7. They gave *Saul* power and authority to bring Christians

bound to *Jerusalem*: they condemned and executed *Stephen*. Also the regal or kingly power was not wholly departed from *Judah*, for it was observed, that King *Agrippa* (Son to *Herod Agrippa*) whom *St. Paul* almost persuaded to be a Christian, was God's anointed and of *Judah's* tribe. Another circumstance of time was, that he was to come during the time of the second temple. *Haggai* ii. 7. &c. This temple was glorified by the presence of *Jesus*, and the glorious gospel he preached in it. And it is well known, that the desolation of the temple and city of *Jerusalem* followed soon after.

2. Not only the time when, but also the place where, the Messiah was to make his appearance, was pointed out. *Micah* v. 2. The *Jewish* Priests and Scribes understood this so well, that without hesitation they told *Herod*, that *Bethlehem* of *Judea* was the place where Christ should be born. *Matt.* ii. 5.

Accordingly it is not only recorded, that *Jesus* was born at *Bethlehem* the city of *David*, *Luke* ii. 7. but also at so public a time, and on so particular an occasion, that it might be preserved in the records both of *Jews* and *Romans*.

3. Likewise this circumstance of *Jesus* being born, when *Joseph* and *Mary* went up to the city of
David

David, to be taxed, or enrolled, very evidently shews that he came of the Tribe of *Judah*, of the Stem of *Jesse* according to the Prophets. It is allowed there might be other persons born at *Bethlehem*, of the Tribe of *Judah*, and of the family of *David*, and also near that time; but this was a particular circumstance necessary to be fulfilled, and had it not evidently been so fulfilled, it would have been a stronger objection, and a more unanswerable argument against *Jesus* being the Christ of God, than ever the enemies of christianity have been able to find; but these things were so plain, that neither the *Rabbies* among the *Jews* then, nor the enemies of the christians in succeeding ages, could find any fault with. —

There are several other circumstances relative to the prophetic character of the *Messiah*, very particularly fulfilled in the person of *Jesus*, such as his quiet and peaceable disposition, he stirred up no sedition—he raised no tumult like an impostor, *Isaiah* xlii. 2, 3. He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break: and the smoking flax shall he not quench. Also the kind and affable, the benign and comfortable nature of his doctrine. *Isaiah* lxi. 1, 2. lv. 1, &c. To this may be added the minute, but very remarkable circumstance, that this king the *Messiah* should come just and having salvation

tion, lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt, the foal of an ass, *Zech.* ix. 9. And also that very particular prediction of his being sold for thirty pieces of Silver, and that cast to the potter, *Zech.* xi. 12, 13. so exactly corresponding with the account given, *Matth.* xxvi. 15. & xxvii. 3, 7, 8, 9, 10. To add no more, that he should be cut off, or die by the hand of violence, but not for himself, who was a righteous and innocent person, but for others, to make his soul an offering for sin, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.

Now here is one open series of predictions relative to the *Messiah*, from first to last, and from his appearing unto his death: and it is no material objection, that something like it has happened to some other persons in some singular instance; for since they have all with just propriety been fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ, and it has never been made appear, that ever they were so fulfilled in any other person, nor any thing like it; it must remain an evidence and strong presumptive proof, that *Jesus* must certainly be the Christ of God.

II. We now come to consider, the nature, purity, excellency and goodness of the doctrine of Jesus Christ, as an evidence that he was no imposter.

1st. The doctrine the Blessed Jesus taught his disciples, was quiet and peaceable, mild and gentle, meek,

meek, humble and condescending, quite the reverse of every fordid purpose, or sinister design; admirably adapted to calm boisterous passions, lower towering pride, and mortify ambition; when his servants shewed any sign of worldly-mindedness or thirst for power and preeminence, he corrected their mistake, and shewed them the absolute necessity of humility. by the setting a little child before them: And so far from giving any the least encouragement to sedition or disobedience to magistrates, he refused not to pay tribute himself, but taught the people to render to *Cæsar* the things which were *Cæsars*, as well as unto God the things, which are Gods. This was not the method of impostors, this was not the way to fit his followers for the carrying on a plot or any worldly design, this was not a likely way for him to be made a King of this world; but it was the way to shew that his design was to build up a spiritual kingdom of righteousness and peace.

2dly As our Blessed Lord taught his Disciples to live a quiet and peaceable life, and to obey magistrates, so also the Image of God, the parent of nature, did remarkably shine in those lessons of friendliness, universal love and benignity to all mankind. Love was to be the distinguishing character of his people, and there were very great reasons for them to love one another; but yet their love and good will was not to be confined to the household
of

of faith, but their neighbour was also to be regarded, and to enjoy the benefit and comfort of their love. But this good will, love, and compassion was yet nobly to be extended further, the most ungrateful and undeserving claims a part of our good offices; our enemies, nay, though they persecute or spitefully use us, we are to love them, pray for them, feed them, and from the heart forgive them. Sure a doctrine so excellent in its nature, so powerfully promoting the good and happiness of all mankind, so disinterested and divine, is worthy of its great author, and has sufficient internal evidence that it is from above.

3dly, To all this it is necessary to add, that the worship of God, recommended in the gospel, is such as is most agreeable to the most noble conceptions we can form of the Deity; it is not to consist in merely outward or ostentatious forms and appearances, but such as worship God, must worship him in spirit and in truth. It is to go to him as our Heavenly Father, the fountain of all good, to adore him for his rich bounty, to give thanks for the mercies and blessings we receive, and to pray for the supply of our wants, for our preservation from all evil, for the increase of the kingdom of righteousness, and common happiness of mankind. Such pious and devout worship of the God of our life, is becoming reasonable beings to perform, and the divine Being

ing to accept; it tends to raise in the mind a warm and grateful sense of the Divine bounty and goodness to us, it enlivens our dependence on him, prepares us better to value his favours, and make the most suitable use of his blessings: This therefore renders us the more meet objects of his regard, and fits us better for the receiving of his blessings than otherwise we should be.

4th. Likewise the precepts and duties of the gospel are unexceptionably great and good, not only with regard to that peaceable and quiet deportment, generous and benevolent disposition observed before, but also, this great preacher of righteousness taught the necessity of the regulation of all the passions, taking up the cross, mortifying sinful and hurtful lusts, an earnest desire after righteousness and goodness of life, a meek condescending spirit, and purity of heart, to do unto others as we reasonably should desire they would do unto us; besides the shining moral excellencies, the doctrine of Jesus Christ encumbers us with no external rites, assists us with a few. These are not calculated for ostentation and parade, nor to burden us with useless ceremonies; but are well and wisely adapted to answer a worthy end, in our solemn and spiritual engagement, and to encourage a comfortable fellowship together. Such is the nature of the Code of laws, or doctrine of Jesus Christ, one compleat

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system

system of morality, ethicks, and religion, admirably fitted to refine and improve human nature, enlarge the understanding, sweeten the affections, and purify the heart. It may be observed, that there were some very wise and just remarks made on the follies of mankind, and some fine things said to promote moral rectitude by the few noted Philosophers of old, before Christianity appeared, and these were indeed some degrees of light shining in a dark place, and though their systems were far from being perfect and complete, yet this might be a means to prepare the minds of the thinking part of mankind to receive that doctrine of Jesus Christ, which opened to men such amiable ideas of the God and Father of all, and afforded such directions, as tended to raise human nature so nearly to the Divine, that they had great reason to conclude, it came from Heaven, and was approved of God.

III. Another rational evidence that Jesus Christ was no deceiver or impostor is, the goodness, purity, and piety, of his own life, consistent with the doctrine he preached to others.

Jesus Christ lived the life he taught others, humble and lowly, never appeared to have any aspiring views; when the people would have taken him by force to make him King, he avoided it by the only method by which it could be done without noise
and

and tumult, and thereby gave proof that his desire was not after that, which would have been of all others the object of an impostor. As he taught his Disciples quietness and a submissive disposition, so he lived himself, so far from enriching himself by the bounty, or spoil of others, that he suffered himself to be destitute of even the comfortable accommodations of human life; the foxes have their holes, and the birds of the air have their nests, but the Son of Man had not where to lay his head. And as he had no worldly designs to carry on, so his generous soul was equally desirous to promote the good and happiness of mankind in common, the poor as well as the rich were in his beneficence equally sharers, and had the gospel preached to them.

2dly. Also our Lord practised that real and unaffected piety and resignation himself as he taught others, and shewed that obedience to the precepts and duties of religion which he recommended to his followers: at the same time he highly condemned and blamed the foolish superstition, hypocrisy, and ostentation of the prevailing religion of that time: he gave a worthy example, in his own person, of that rational and real Piety, which only can be acceptable to the Father of Spirits. He attended public worship at the stated seasons and there shewed that these were the most proper seasons, for acts of mercy, benevolence, and compassion one to-

wards another. His prayers were, not to be publicly taken notice of in the corners of the streets, but retired from common observation, earnest, forgiving, excusing, and praying for his most violent and cruel enemies, perfectly resigning himself to the will of his heavenly Father, and stoop'd to those external duties, which was fulfilling of righteousness.

3dly. To his Piety we may add his goodness and God-like benevolence, this unconquerable benevolence appeared with unsullied lustre on every occasion, he went about doing good, his converse with mankind consisted in a scene of friendliness and useful offices, he was the friend of the oppressed, the kind relief of the infirm, and caused the widows heart to sing for joy. Whatsoever ungrateful returns he met with, or whatever insults he received, however his doctrine was opposed, or his character reproached, he still remained the same; noble, great and good was the temper and habit of his mind; such as were ready to take vengeance on their enemies, knew not their own spirit, nor his: when persons stubbornly opposed him, and rejected his doctrine, he was grieved for the hardness of their hearts. When *Jerusalem* had received so much grace in vain, and abused so many mercies as filled up the measure of their iniquity, and made themselves vessels of wrath, how was the benevolent redeemer affected with their deplorable state! How did he bewail

wail their infatuation ! He beheld the City, — he wept over it.

Such was the life of the blessed Jesus, admirable and shining his character, attracting his example of humility and peace, piety and unaffected religion, friendliness and benevolence ; in the whole a complete system of moral rectitude, goodness and greatness of mind ; such was the doctrine he taught, than which nothing could be further from any appearance, or sign of deception or imposture, but on the contrary every rational mark and internal evidence manifested that it was of God.

IV. We now come to consider the powerful and awakening testimony of miracles, to prove that this divine person and doctrine did really and in truth come from God.

Tho' some persons affect to speak lightly of miracles in general, as fit for none but fools, or persons of easy credulity, yet it is possible such persons might appear wiser by considering, that the seeing of miracles might have a surprizing effect upon themselves. It is granted, that no miracles can prove a doctrine to be good, which is in it's nature bad and corrupt, no more than a good doctrine can prove a miracle to be real, which is not so. Yet notwithstanding when a doctrine is in it self good and worthy of coming

coming from God, and miracles are wrought in favour of that doctrine, this is an additional evidence that it is from God, and this is all the evidence the nature of the thing is capable of, and] therefore all that can in reason be required in order to be assented to, and depended upon, as the truth and will of God.

And the miracles which were performed by Jesus Christ, will (I am persuaded) appear to be a powerful attestation of his divine mission, considered in the following light.

1st. The miracles wrought by Jesus Christ, were many, not confined to a few instances, which might have been suspected. The great number of his miracles occasioned many to believe on him, for this was one thing they expected of the *Messiah*; and therefore said, When Christ cometh, will he do more miracles than these which this man hath done, *John. vii. 31.* This was one thing that greatly alarmed his enemies, what do we, said they, for this man doth many miracles. *John. xi. 47.* Had his miracles, tho' real, been but few in number, they would not have had the same weighty effect on the minds of men; he would not have been thought to have exceeded many of their Prophets, which were before him. And doubtless they would not have failed to have suggested, that as he did but few

few mighty works, there might be some collusion in the case in order to raise his fame and character as a wonder-worker. And also our modern Scepticks and Infidels would have exclaimed, why was this mighty great and good man, (who pretended so much regard for the good of mankind) so sparing in his generous and beneficent acts? Why so much partiality, picking and culling of objects? Why did he not shew his compassion to all distressed objects, and shew his disinterested and universal benevolence, by diffusing the blessings of comfort, healing and health to all that needed, where ever he came? This he did to the silencing every objection of this kind, his miracles were common without respect of person or quality, rich or poor, their numbers were too great to be recorded in the concise History of our Lords mighty works: the unhappy and distressed objects were brought to this great physician in great numbers—he healed them all.

2dly. The miracles wrought by Jesus Christ were not only very many, but they were various, very different from each other.

Had the works of healing performed by our Lord, been confined to but one or two sorts of disorders, it probably would have been suggested that he might have acquired some particular art in those cases,

cases, which had escaped the observation of other persons. But as his mighty works and miracles were so various and different from one another, it sufficiently takes off any such objection; for certainly there could be no greater diversity in any thing of this kind, than there appeared in the mighty works of Jesus: the curing a person of a fever, and the cleansing of a leper, were very different things; the causing the lame to walk, and giving sight to the blind, or to give hearing to the deaf, and to restore a withered hand were very different works; nor is there any similarity between the feeding of 500 persons with a small quantity of bread, and the calming the tempestuous wind, and the raging sea; and yet in all these instances of his wondrous works, it is said to his honour, that he did all things well. And to these various mighty works our Lord appealed, as an evidence of his Divine Mission, that he was the person which was to come. He said, go and shew John again those things, which ye do hear and see: The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached to them. *Matt. ii. 4. 5.*

3dly. The miracles of Jesus Christ were ocular, not performed in an obscure and dark manner,

but

but most commonly in the open and public view of mankind, and plain to the eyes of men.

Had our Lords Miracles been in common performed in darkness and a private manner, or the persons he healed, been only his own followers, or the cases not suffered to be inspected, or examined into, then there would have been reason to suppose there was some fraud or deceit in the case, but it was quite otherwise. Many of his Miracles were performed in the open sight of men in the most public manner, before friends and enemies. The man whose hand was withered, was in the Synagogue, before the Scribes, they knew his case, for they watched Jesus, whether he would heal on the Sabbath day, the man stretched forth his hand, and was healed in their sight,—they could find no fault in the work, but objected against the time. *Luke vi. 6.* When persons were Leprous, it must be evident to the sight of others that they were so, and also as evident when they were cleansed; also when a man was known to have been born blind, and our Lord opened his eyes, the people must be judges by their own eye sight, whether the man could see, or not, there was no room for fraud and cheating in such cases, they were plain and clear, no juggling or flight of hand tricks would do such things; here therefore was ocular evidence, that he worked real Miracles and was no Impostor.

4thly. The Miracles of Jesus Christ were great and stupendous, plain and incontestable, as well as perfect in their kind.

It was said, that when Jesus came into his own country, he could there do no mighty work, save that he laid his hands on a few sick folks, and healed them. The reason given was, because of their unbelief. *Matt.* xiii. 58. and *Mark* vi. 5. Not that he had not the same power in that place, as in other places; but because he had too much goodness, and compassion on them, even under their wilful Infidelity, to do that which would only have added to their weight of guilt in rejecting him and his doctrine. We are also here to observe, that the healing a few sick folk (though a work benevolent and good) was not considered as his mighty works. Yet sure there is a great difference in the circumstances and maladies of those miserable objects of distress, When persons had long groaned under their painful calamities, and which had baffled all the art of physicians, for them to be healed without any medicinal operation, in an instant, and by speaking a word only, is no small work. Again, to cleanse a person of a stubborn leprosy, or to give sight to one that was born blind, must I think, be looked upon as great and mighty works, and the man whose eyes were opened, argued very rationally in this case, Why herein is a marvellous thing, that
ye

ye know not whence he is, and yet he hath opened mine eyes. Now we know that God heareth not sinners: but if any man be a worshipper of God, and doth his will, him he heareth. Since the world began, was it not heard, that any man opened the eyes of one that was born blind, if this man were not of God, he could do nothing. *John ix. 30.* And again, it is worthy of notice, that his power extended not only to the healing of all even the most violent, or Chronical Diseases, by a word or touch, but also at a distance, and without seeing the patient, so that he might be justly said to be mighty in word and deed. Again, his power was not limited to the healing of Diseases only, but also he could command the wind and water at his pleasure, at the sight of which, the Disciples had great reason in surprize to say, what manner of man is this, that even the winds and the sea obey him! to our Lord's mighty works, I need only now add, his raising the dead to life, after they were known to have been dead a long time, were buried, or carrying forth in order to be buried, than which nothing can be a greater Miracle, or afford a more satisfactory evidence that he acted by the power of God: for as nothing less than the Omnipotent God could give being and life to man at first, so it must require the same power to renew vital life in him again after his dissolution. Upon which, I think, every thoughtful, candid and unprejudiced person,

would conclude with *Nicodemus*, that Jesus was a teacher come from God; for no man could do such Miracles as he did, except God was with him. *John* iii. 2.

5thly, And lastly, the Miracles Jesus did were not only astonishingly great, but admirably benevolent and good.

If wicked and diabolical Spirits worked Miracles, doubtless they would be like the author, evil in their nature, and with a design to promote the kingdom of darkness and wickedness. If wicked and bad men had power to work Miracles, it is evident it could not be to promote Righteousness, nor from a just regard for the comfort and happiness of mankind, this being contrary to their spirit and disposition. So likewise the tricks of jugglers would be only *Simon* like, to amaze the people, and get a name without regarding the good consequences of it to humanity. But the Miracles of the friendly and benign Jesus were as good as they were great, they were acted from generous motives, from feeling compassion, and tender sympathy. He went about doing good, this was the delightful business of his life. See him meeting the solemn procession, the mournful attendants, and throbbing Widow, who had lost her Son, her only Son: he, beholding with compassion, and feeling for

for her woe, faith unto her, weep not — he touched the bier—the dead sat up, and the Widow's tears were turned to Joy. *Luke vii.*

Again, how divinely bright did this heavenly teacher appear once and again in the wilderness? There he fed the Souls of a numerous audience with the bread of life, opening unto them the heavenly doctrines of Salvation, and the love of God; and from motives of goodness and compassion to human weakness, worked a Miracle for the seasonable refreshment of their bodies. compare *Mat. xiv. 14. and xv. 32. Mark vi. 34. and viii. 1. Luke ix. 11.* In short, his numberless Miracles (excepting very few) were of the most useful kind, proceeding from a generous and god-like principle of benevolence and love. And thus having finished his Ministerial office with a true dignity worthy of his high character as the Son of God; from the same principle of love and goodness to mankind, and to answer that great end for which he came into the world, he gave up himself for us, to die for our Sins, and to purchase Eternal Redemption for us, with his own most precious blood.

Now from this brief view given above, of the evidence our Lord gave, that he was the Christ, I think our faith in him, and our dependance upon
him

him as such, stands upon a just, solid, and rational foundation; as far as I can conceive, he completed every part of his character, and was wanting in nothing that should have been found in him. He fulfilled with propriety every part of his prophetic Character, without which he would have had no claim to the title of *Messiah* the prince, but in the doing which, he stood fair to open his divine Mission; this he did by teaching a doctrine holy and pure, benevolent and good, spiritual and divine, such as should be expected to come from God. And his own life was a shining comment upon his doctrine, and proved the honesty and sincerity of his profession. Nothing now was further wanting to prove beyond all reasonable doubt, that he was the Christ which was to come, and to prove his divine Mission, but the powerful and striking evidence of Miracles: of these he gave more abundant and various instances than ever any man before did, open and plain to friends and enemies, stupendous in their nature, divinely good and benevolent to men, each of those particular parts of his conduct speak very highly in his favour, taken separately, but to take them unitedly in connection together, they form a complete view of what might be expected from him, and exhibit all that proof and evidence necessary to be given, all that a reasonable man can require, or that the nature of the case would admit of, that that *Jesus of Nazareth* is

is certainly the Christ of God ; for never man spake, never man lived, never man did like this man.

S E R M O N, II.

2. P E T E R. I. xvi.

For we have not followed cunningly devised fables.

HA V I N G in my former discourse given an abstract view of the evidences which our Lord gave in his own person, that he was the Christ of God ; I now proceed to shew the great and sufficient evidence that we have of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the true and faithful continuance of his doctrine.

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As the prejudiced Jews could think of but one way to evade the force of evidence, that Jesus was the Christ, by his resurrection from the dead; It will be sufficient for me briefly to take notice of the absurdities, which this pretence carries in the very face of it: viz that his disciples should take away the body of Jesus, out of the Sepulchre while the soldiers slept.

Jesus being now given up into the hands of his enemies to crucify, and to put him to death, no doubt but they would take effectual care of that part. The Jewish Rulers then go to *Pilate* for a guard over the Sepulchre, — it is granted, I suppose as many soldiers as they pleased, for they were to make it as sure as they could; — the soldiers are taught to say, they slept upon their watch; yet they knew how the body of Jesus was taken away, and by whom, tho' they slept all the time. But besides this absurdity at first sight, I suppose no man, that ever read with what good order and strict discipline the Roman soldiers were governed at that time, can ever believe that they should all sleep at a time upon their watch. Neither were the disciples in any disposition for such an attempt, had it been practicable: most of them deserted their Lord when he was betrayed, — when he was dead their hope was so too, they said. "We trusted it had been he which should have redeemed Israel."

-rael." *Luke xxiv. 21.* Or had they been so hardy as to make so strange an attempt, what probability could there be of succeeding? could they think of finding this guard of armed soldiers all sleeping? or if they were, the work was not to be done in an instant, rolling away the great stone, and taking out the body, must take some time, and be attended with some bustle and noise, the least of which might frustrate their design, and bring destruction on themselves. And after all, what view could they have in this dangerous affair? they could not think of his working more Miracles when he was dead; they could not shew him to the people for a living man, when he was a dead corps; they could not make a king of a dead man;—they could make no other use of him but to bury him again.

But though this inconsistent story could be no argument against Christianity, yet I consider it as a very good one for it, for it stands as an irrefragable proof of the miserable distress the Jewish rulers were under, to find any plausible pretence for denying the resurrection of Jesus. I proceed now to the evidences which we have of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and the continuance of his doctrine, and this I shall attempt in the following method.

I. I shall shew that the apostles were credible witnesses, who could not be imposed upon them-

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selves, nor deceived with regard to the resurrection of Christ, or his doctrine.

II. They were faithful witnesses, who had neither power, nor could they have any interest, or design, to impose on others.

III. That the same doctrine which Christ, and his apostles at first preached in *Judea*, is faithfully conveyed down to our time in the books of the holy scriptures.

I. I am to shew that the apostles were credible witnesses, who could not be imposed upon themselves, or deceived with regard to the resurrection of Christ, or his doctrine.

In order that the apostles should be such credible witnesses as might be depended upon, it must be necessary for them to have had incontestable evidence and ocular proof, that the same identical person of Jesus, with whom they had lived, and whom they had known to have been dead and buried, was alive again.—This evidence they had abundantly, they had been his domestic attendants along time before his death, his form, visage, and countenance, his lineaments and features and his voice, were all familiar to them, the subjects, and manner of his conversation they were perfectly acquainted with ;
therefore

therefore when they saw him again after his resurrection, they could not be deceived in his person, whom they so perfectly knew, they could not mistake another man for him;—they saw him,—they heard him, they conversed with him,—they eat and drank with him, and their hands handled the word of life. Add to this, the times of his shewing of himself alive after his passion, were not confined to a few instances, but they were many, and from time to time, and for the long period of forty days. Had he been with them but a short time, or had his visits been transient, there might have been more reason to suppose that there might be some mistake in it, but in such a time as forty days that he was with them, they had every means, every advantage of cool enquiry, deliberate observation and complete satisfaction.

2dly. The apostles were not fanciful visionaries, or wild enthusiasts, who were prepared from such views, to receive the tidings of their Lord's resurrection with eagerness and rapture. No, so far from it, that they were disinclined to receive the report even to a fault: yet even this is of use to us, as it stands upon record, how very careful they were not to be imposed upon, in a matter of such importance. When the women which were early at the sepulchre returned, and informed the eleven disciples and others, of the resurrection of their Lord.

“ Their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.” *Luke* xxiv. 11. “ And when he appeared unto two of his disciples as they walked,——and they returned the same hour unto *Jerusalem*, and found the eleven gathered together, and them that were with them,——and they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread. *Luke* xxiv. 13, 33, 35. Yet neither believed they them.” *Mark* xvi. 13. Certainly in all this there appears not the least mark of an easy or an enthusiastick credulity, in these witnesses of the resurrection of Christ; but all the appearance of sober, candid persons, who would have complete evidence before they assented, even to a pleasing and interesting truth. St. *Matthew* informs us that “ some doubted” *Matt.* xxviii. 17. And I think it would be no impropriety to say they all did, though some did longer than others, because they had not the same evidence so soon; for I find not one of them believed, before he had some ocular proof of the fact. And it is a very remarkable account St. *Luke* gives us of the disposition of the disciples, and their wariness, that when the Lord appeared unto them, “ They believed not for joy.” *Luke* xxiv. 41. The sight of their Lord when he was risen again, must necessarily be extremely pleasing and agreeable, yet they were, even then very cautious, lest their sudden transport should overcome their sober reason.

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From this short account (to which much more might be added) I think it sufficiently appears, that the Apostles were candid, sober, unbiaſſed men; and that they had all neceſſary and demonſtrative evidence of the reſurrection of Jeſus Chriſt from the dead: and therefore, as ſuch, are to be relied and depended upon as credible witneſſes, who were not, or could not, be impoſed upon in this affair.

3dly. I now come to obſerve, that the Apoſtles were not only qualified and proper witneſſes of the reſurrection of their Lord, but were likewiſe every way qualified, and credible witneſſes of his will and doctrine.

They were his conſtant and familiar, his intimate and domeſtic attendants for years together; in conſequence of which they had all the advantage of his public miniſtrations, and thereby were qualified to form in their minds, a proper ſyſtem of his doctrine, much better than others who heard him but at certain times, or on ſome particular ſubjects and occaſions. They had alſo the advantage of private opportunities to aſk their maſter to explain ſuch things as appeared to them dark and obſcure, and he was ready ſo to do, in all things that concerned them to know; and would ſometimes aſk them, if they underſtood him, in order that their
minds

minds might be stored, with a clear and comprehensive sense of his doctrine, as scribes who in due time were to bring it again out of their treasure, and deliver it to others also. These were great advantages which the apostles had, for a clear understanding of their doctrine, during the time of his ministry. Again, it is also to be observed, that after his resurrection, he employed a great part of the forty days that he abode with them, in giving them instructions, and “speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God.” *Acts* i. 3. He promised them also, that after his departure, “the comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, should be sent unto them, and that he should teach them all things, and bring all things to their remembrance, whatsoever he had said unto them.” *John* xiv. 26. and xvi. 7.—13. And he likewise commanded them to, “tarry at *Jerusalem* until they were endued with power from on high.” *Luke* xxiv. 49. And this promise was admirably fulfilled, about ten days after the ascension of Jesus Christ; to the surprise and amazement of the many thousands of *Jews* who came from the wide nations of the world, to worship at *Jerusalem* at the feast of *Pentecost*. *Acts* ii. &c.

The apostles having now, every necessary means of light information, and instruction into the mind, will, and doctrine of their Lord; they were credible

ble witnesses of it, and persons sufficiently qualified to teach it perfectly to others also.

It may be objected, there was one (*St. Paul*) who was the most active and laborious apostle of them all, who had not those advantages which the others had, “ as he was born out of due time.”

I cannot conceive that this instance, can be any disadvantage to the credit of Christianity, but when we consider the remarkable circumstances attending his extraordinary conversion, it will appear rather, as an additional evidence in favour of it.

The account we have of *St. Paul* in short is this : he was a native of the city of *Tarsus*, and educated at *Jerusalem* at the feet of *Gamaliel*, and taught in the most perfect manner the Jewish law.—He was a zealous Pharisee, and a hot bigot against the Christians, and being exceedingly mad against them, he persecuted them even to strange cities : for he thought in himself, that he ought to do many things contrary to the name of *Jesus of Nazareth*. In consequence of which, himself desired letters of the high priest to *Damascus*, that if he found any christians there, he might bring them bound to *Jerusalem* :—he received his authority and went. But when he came nigh to *Damascus*, at midday he saw in the way a light from Heaven, above the brightness

ness of the Sun, shining round about him and them that were with him, under which sudden surprize they all fell to the earth; when to his yet greater astonishment he heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul* why persecutest thou me? and when the men that journied with him, had recovered themselves so far as to stand up, they stood speechless, they heard the sound of the voice, though not so as to understand that it was a voice of words spoken. And after Jesus Christ had declared to him who he was, and directed him what he should do. He then opened unto him the grand and benevolent design of his calling him in so extraordinary a manner, saying, for this purpose have I appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the People and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.

Now from this account of *St. Paul*, and the circumstances of his conversion, I observe first, that he was a persecutor upon principle and from zeal. His going to *Damascus* was by his own desire, he was not sent like *Joab* to number the people, contrary

trary to his own inclination; therefore was not likely to contrive this story of an heavenly light and revelation, to excuse the neglect of his office. Again, its to be observed he had men with him, (how many we know not, but most probable not a few, to assist him in bringing his prisoners to *Jerusalem*) and it does not appear that they turned to be Christians upon it; but they were witnesses, whether *St. Paul's* account was true or not. And doubtless they were called upon by the rulers to give an account of this affair. Though these men knew not the voice of words spoken, yet they knew whether they heard any thing; whether there was any such heavenly light, whether they were all stricken down to the earth on that account, or whether *Paul* was blind, and so led by the hand to *Damascus*: now had this not been incontestable matter of fact, the apostle would never boldly have alledged it, as he did in his own defence, before the Jewish council, *Acts* xxii. who must have known the imposture, had there been any; and would not have failed to have made a good use of it, as it was a capital crime, and made death by the law of *Moses*. *Deut.* xviii. 20. Or when they arraigned him in a judicial form, before the Roman court, they would have had their witnesses with them, and proved him to be an impostor of the first rate. This would have been matter of importance, and a fine topick for *Tertullus* to have harangued upon, much better than to charge him with being “ a pestilent fellow, a mover of
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ness of the Sun, shining round about him and them that were with him, under which sudden surprize they all fell to the earth; when to his yet greater astonishment he heard a voice saying unto him, *Saul, Saul* why persecutest thou me? and when the men that journeyed with him, had recovered themselves so far as to stand up, they stood speechless, they heard the sound of the voice, though not so as to understand that it was a voice of words spoken. And after Jesus Christ had declared to him who he was, and directed him what he should do. He then opened unto him the grand and benevolent design of his calling him in so extraordinary a manner, saying, for this purpose have I appeared unto thee, to make thee a minister and a witness, both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee; delivering thee from the People and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified, by faith that is in me.

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sedition, or a ring-leader among the Christians, who went about to prophane the temple." *Acts* xxiv. 5, 6. The first and last of which they could not maintain, and the other was of little consequence to the Roman judge: but not a word of his imposture. Hence then, the account of his extraordinary Conversion stands fair and unimpeached. Also the thing itself appears worthy of the wisdom and goodness of God: So to call a person of such intrepidity and zeal, to a work so dangerous and laborious, as the preaching of the gospel among the Gentiles and Idolatrous nations was. For the account given of this grand and interesting affair, was not, that from a mere partial regard to the person of *Paul*, that he was called in so singular and powerful a manner. No, but for a much more noble and glorious design; i. e. to promote the common happiness of mankind, by turning them from darkness to light, and from the power of sin to God, that they might be saved.

And to this end, Jesus appeared unto *St. Paul* personally, after his ascension several times, and gave him complete instructions into the doctrine he was to preach. Upon the whole, I think, if we attend to all the circumstances, and the design of this extraordinary conversion of *St. Paul*, it will appear at least, a very good collateral evidence for the truth of Christianity.

b II. I now proceed to shew, that the Apostles were faithful witnesses, who could have no interest or design, neither had they power to impose on others.

1st. If the Apostles were crafty and designing men, who intended to deceive, let us take a view of what prospect they could have in so extravagant an attempt: in order to this let us balance the account of the gain and loss, which must appear evidently before their eyes. As to their gain, if beyond every rational hope they could succeed, so far as to gain any considerable party to their side, by those Disciples indeed they might be admired, esteemed or carested, they might sometimes eat of their bread, and drink of their cups, or be lodged in their houses, be esteemed the heads of the party, and the first builders of their churches, they might be considered as very remarkable persons while they lived, and their name might live when they were dead, as the authors of a new religion. Admirable indeed! But let us see the contrast.

They must set out under every disadvantage, men of low education and family, without riches, without powerful friends to support them, and no interest among the ruling powers. Against all this, how could they think of succeeding? they must think that their pretensions would be very soon and nicely

examined into, and their imposture detected; and, being of men, be soon brought to nothing. Beside this, they could not be insensible that the work would be attended with great labour and difficulty; they could not undertake it for ease or pleasure. Again, for base men to put on the disagreeable restraint of an holy, righteous, godly, and virtuous life, and for so many to act such a part well, and upon every trying occasion, and for a long time, was a very hazardous and discouraging affair. But, suppose them unaccountably to brave all these impediments, what motive could they have then? not riches, the mammon of this world, no, their doctrine was not calculated for any thing of this kind. Not the honours or esteem of the world, quite the reverse; their Lord had told them they should be hated of the world. in the world they were to expect tribulation, in him only they could have peace. Indeed they had seen sufficient, in the recent treatment of their Lord and Master, to satisfy them of what they might expect from the world.—Every prospect they could have was against them. And certainly the view of contempt and shame, reproach and poverty, misery and stripes, imprisonment, stoning and crucifying, could be no desirable things; and as there could be no prospect of any gain or worldly advantage to balance, or which could bear the least proportion to the loss and sufferings, they could have no motives to induce
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them to turn impostors and deceivers, with destruction clear in view.

2dly. I now come to shew, that if the Apostles had been designing men, they could not have had power to impose on, and deceive the world in this affair.

They opened their commission on the spot (at *Jerusalem*,) where their Lord was crucified about seven weeks before, and at a publick time, at the feast of Pentecost, the most unlikely time and place that could be thought of, for the opening or attempting such an imposture, there were at that time such numbers of the *Jews* assembled together, who would on such an interesting affair, examine things to the bottom, and most likely, would have detected the imposture, if there had been any, but that they could not, is evident ; for had they discovered any such thing, it must certainly have crushed Christianity in the bud, and thereby spoiled its progress for ever, as the cheat and imposture would have been published in the distant nations, before the Apostles went there to preach. There were also at *Jerusalem* the learned Rabbins and Scribes, and the grand council of the Jewish Elders, who from their unconquerable aversion, to the Apostles and their doctrine, would leave nothing unexamined, no means untried, which might bring them,
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their conduct, or their doctrine into contempt and disgrace.—There were some brought before this great court of the Jews, and examined over and over, and their judges sufficiently prejudiced against them; therefore, if there had been any fraud or cheat in the affair, it is not at all likely it would have escaped them. But here it is evident no such thing could be, for if it had, certainly their work must have been over at *Jerusalem*, and their pretensions and scheme frustrated in all *Judea*, and the regions round about; which it is evident was not the case, for they continued to preach there and with great success. Again, if we could suppose the Apostles to be now such adepts in their profession, and so artful in defending of themselves, that the court could make no discovery of the fraud, it is even then extremely hard to conceive, that they could have such a command over an hundred and twenty or five hundred persons, that not one of them should ever (not upon any occasion, or under any fear or danger,) make any discovery of such an imposture to save their own lives. From all which I think it is most reasonable to conclude, that if the Apostles had been only cheats and impostors, they never could have succeeded in such an attempt, and in so surprising a manner, as is evident both from the account of friends and enemies; that in a short time the Gospel made a great and rapid progress in the wide nations of the world.

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But it is yet to be added, though they could not be detected of any fraudulence in what they asserted, yet they could not have succeeded as they did by their own power or art, or any dogmatical confidence they could assume. Their doctrine was not calculated to please men, or sooth their passions, like that of *Mahomet*. Had the Apostles gone out into the city of *Jerusalem*, or into the Temple, and upon their word only without any other credentials, asserted that Jesus of *Nazareth* who had been crucified was alive again, that he was the redeemer of *Israel*, and was appointed of God to be the judge of quick and dead: was this likely to gain Profelites? No, to be treated with contempt and disregard, was the best usage they could expect.— Their Lord knew this and therefore commanded them to “ tarry at *Jerusalem* until they were endued with power from on high.” *Luke* xxiv. 49.— They received this promised power on the day of *Pentecost*; one eminent part of which was the gift of tongues: a gift so peculiar and extraordinary in it's nature, so incontestably evident, and of such utility, was certainly worthy of their Lord and Master's sending. The Apostles being now endued with this gift as well as others by the Holy Ghost, they were heard with astonishment; the people knew that they spake with propriety many languages, and they knew also that they were ignorant *Galileans*, who had never learned them in an ordinary way: it

It therefore followed that it must be an extraordinary gift, for some great design, and this prepared them to enquire what this should mean. They being thus awakened to a sober attention on the Apostles first preaching, the success was answerable to the great means used. And without this power or gift it is evident, they could not have preached the gospel to nations of different languages which they never understood.

3dly. We are further to observe, that the Apostles were faithful witnesses of Jesus Christ, and his doctrine.

This part of their character evidences itself on all occasions,—Under the greatest and most painful trials,—No threats,—No beatings, stripes nor imprisonments availed any thing; they neither desisted from their preaching, nor varied in their doctrine. The same things which they declared concerning Jesus and his doctrine at one time, they did at other times, the same doctrine which they preached to the common people, they as boldly declared before the rulers. When the rulers and high priest commanded them “not to speak at all, nor teach in the name of Jesus. *Peter* and the other Apostles, answered and said, we ought to obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on

on a tree. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and Saviour, to give repentance to *Israel* and forgiveness of sins, and we are his witnesses of these things." *Acts* v. 29, &c.

Another proof of the Apostles fidelity is, that they were constant, diligent, and laborious, in the discharge of the great and important office, unto which they were called. As they feared no corporal punishment, so they spared no bodily labour; they sought no more their own ease, than they did the honours and emoluments of the world. Their work and labour in preaching the word, and planting the gospel, in so many distant, and to them unknown parts of the world, must certainly expose them to journeyings often, to many hardships, sufferings, and perils, by sea and land, in city and country, to weariness and painfulness, to hunger and thirst. Now to endure all this fatigue and pains, and constantly to go on, and preach the same doctrine, both the unpalatable as well as the most pleasing and agreeable parts of it, every where and to all men, must be a good evidence for the Apostles, and the best evidence that any men in the world could give of their fidelity, that they were faithful, honest, and true witnesses of Jesus Christ, and his doctrine. I now proceed to shew,

III. That the same doctrine which was at first preached in *Judea*, by Jesus Christ and his Apostles,

is faithfully conveyed down to our time, in the books of the Holy Scriptures.

1st. There is no appearance of any difference in the doctrine, which the several Apostles at first taught. For the unhappy differences which did subsist, between the *Jew* and *Gentile* Christians for some time, did not originate from any difference in the Apostles doctrine, but from other persons, without any authority from them, as appears, *Acts* xv. 1,—24. So likewise the different ideas which some of the *Corinthians* had of the Apostles, did not arise from any inconsistency in their doctrine, but from the groundless insinuations of some persons, who troubled that church. But as the Apostles had all received their doctrine from the same Lord, and had all received the same spirit of truth, so they all preached the same Jesus, and the same doctrine of salvation by him. “ Testifying first to the *Jews*, and then to the *Gentiles*, repentance towards God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ ” And for this we have not only their own general declaration, but when we inspect the substance of their sermons and doctrine, every where, and on all occasions, to *Jews* and *Gentiles*, and in distant nations, in their first planting of the Gospel and building up of churches, there appears to be one uniform and consistent scheme of religion, faith and doctrine.

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It is also to be observed, that there were epistles sent to many of the churches after they were planted, those books were wrote on different occasions, and contain a variety of subjects, and in them are many questions and debates handled; yet notwithstanding all this, there appears through all one consistent system of religion and doctrine, and the very same which was at first preached at *Jerusalem*, was delivered to the *Gentiles*, at the first planting of the Gospel.

2dly. I observe, that the churches had copies of those books of the New Testament, delivered unto them for to keep, in order that the doctrine of the gospel might be preserved pure and uncorrupt down to the succeeding ages. That there were such books at first given out, the enemies of Christianity have assisted us with a very good argument to depend upon; for they tell us, "there have been forged books under such names." If so, there certainly must have been some genuine ones, for there never was a counterfeit, where there was no reality. And I suppose these gentlemen would never have known, that there had been ever any such forged books, had it not been for the very great waryness of the Christians of those days, not to be imposed upon. And if there were some books forged, that can be no argument against the genuine truth and authority of those books, against which there never was

any objection. Many of the books of the New Testament appeared very early, even in the life time of the Apostles, and many others of the first Christians, and they were mostly under the author's own name, and sent by special messengers to the churches they had planted, and to Christians unto whom they had preached, or where the gospel had been preached by others.—The people there knew from whom they received those books, in the doctrine of which they were so much interested; and the Apostles not only knew that the churches did receive them, but how they received them, and what effect it had upon them; for they had a continued correspondence with the churches both by messengers as well as by letters, therefore it appears that these first churches could not be imposed upon, by false, or forged books, in the days of the Apostles, but were supplied with such as were true and genuine for their own use, and well calculated to preserve the gospel faith and doctrine, pure, true, and uncorrupt down to the later ages of the world.

3dly. Let us now see, how the books of the Holy Scriptures were preserved, down through the first succeeding ages after the Apostles.

At this time Christianity had surprizingly prevailed, and made a rapid progress over the Roman empire. The books of the Scripture were now
generally

generally known, and dispersed among the Christians in the distant nations of the world ; and the Christians had a very great and zealous regard for the Scriptures, looking upon them as the only perfect rule of their faith and practice, consequently would always be very watchful, that no alteration should be made in their copies. And though in those ages new sects and parties arose, and some Rites and Ceremonies altered, yet this tended to keep them more upon their guard, and as the Scriptures were then publicly read in the Christian Assemblies, and before all men, *Christians, Jews,* or *Heathens*, they were all acquainted with them : Therefore it seems impossible, for the Scriptures to be corrupted or altered by any one party, without being exposed by the others, except we can suppose the world to agree to cheat themselves. It also further appears, from the account given by those who lived, and wrote in these early ages, that they had the same books of Scripture for their rule, as we read was given out at first by the same authors, and under the same names ; and also the many citations from them on various occasions, proves the doctrine contained in them to be the same. And I think it is no small evidence of the genuineness and truth, of those books of the Scripture which they had, that the most virulent enemies of Christianity, even *Porphry, Celsus,* or *Julian* the apostate, had never the face to deny the genuineness

ineness of those books, no, nor the facts recorded in them to have been done in different parts of the world.—They lived near enough to the time, and had sufficient advantages to make proper and nice enquiry, they had art, learning, and authority for it, and bitter prejudice against the Christians, to prompt them to it ; if any thing faulty could have been made appear against those books of the Scriptures, they would not have failed to have made the most of it, as an home thrust against the Christians: It must therefore evidently be the force of truth, and incontestable matter of fact, which could silence them on this head. But they were not only silent with regard to the truth and purity of the Scriptures, but when they thought it would be any way serviceable to them, they would cite precepts out of those Scriptures against the Christians. And *Trypho* the Jew acknowledged to *Justin Martyr* (which was in the Second Cent.) “ That the precepts which are commanded in their gospel (which his curiosity had prompted him to read) were so great and admirable, that he supposed no man could keep them.” This not only proves the existence of those Scriptures at that time, but the genuineness of the doctrine contained in them. And the even tacit acknowledgment of such professed and bitter enemies to the Christians is, I think, a very good evidence that those books of the Scripture which they had at that time, were true and genuine.

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To this we may add, that in the third, and more especially in the fourth Century, many new customs and doctrines arose; and they disputed about them with great warmth and acrimony; and many synods, and councils were held on those occasions. Yet notwithstanding all their parties and factions, either in that pestering affair about *Easter*, or other fasts and feasts, or in the case of the *Novatian* Schism, or the heated contentions between the *Arians*, and the *Athanasians*, I find not one instance in all those long and angry debates, that any one party charged the other, that they had wrong, or different Scriptures, or that they had corrupted the copies of the Scriptures which they had. Which, as they had so great an animosity one against the other, they would not have failed to have done, if any such thing could have been proved. From all which it appears, that the Holy Scriptures were brought down for three or four hundred years, as they were delivered unto the Saints, true and uncorrupt.

4thly. It remains now to be considered, how those Scriptures of truth, have been preserved from these early ages, down to the time of the Reformation.

Here indeed we are to come through the most dark and ignorant ages, since the gospel appeared in the world; and also, the time when the greatest
corruptions

corruptions were brought into it. But neither the one, nor the other, is any proof that the Scriptures must be corrupted: and I think there is good reason to depend upon it that they are not. If ever they were, it might be presumed to be in this period, by the church of *Rome*, for at this time it was that they arrived at the greatest power and extent. But there were even then, such insuperable difficulties, in an attempt of that kind, which would have rendered it abortive, by being exposed and exploded. This appears by observing first, that the Gospel was now planted in three quarters of the Globe, in *Constantine's* time, or the fourth Century; and as far distant as *Persia* and *Britain*. Now had all the Churches been under the See of *Rome*, at that time, it is evident at first sight, that to collect all the copies of those Churches, of so many Nations and Languages, in order to alter and change the Text and Doctrine, would expose them to great contempt, and be attended with violent Opposition. But it does not appear, that ever the Christian Churches were under the bishop of *Rome*, or any thing like it. There were in those days very large Churches independant on the See of *Rome*, and over which the bishop of *Rome* claimed no authority, only to stand in rank and character as the first bishop; and even this created some jealousy between that of *Rome* and *Constantinople* in the fifth Century. And which subsisted more or less, until the

the *Greek* Church entirely seperated her connection and communion from the *Latin* in the eleventh Century.

In the sixth Century, when *Austen* or *Augustin* was sent over here by Pope *Gregory* to convert the *Britains*, he found there were Christians here before he came, and it is said, there was a large seminary at *Bangor* in *Wales*. How long the *Britains* had enjoyed the Gospel, or by whom it was brought here, is uncertain, some count four hundred years before *Augustin* came, about the year one hundred and eighty. And if it was near that time, their copies were of a very early date. Yet when this *Augustin* came, though they differed about *Easter*, and Baptism, &c. yet there is no account of any difference between him and the Christians here about the Scripture; therefore their books of the Scripture, and the Doctrine contained in them must be the same: a good evidence how pure and genuine the Scriptures were preserved, for six hundred years.

The next and following ages, as the *Greek* and and *Latin* Churches could not cordially agree; and many factions and parties arose, they then stood as an effectual bar on each other, that nothing of this kind could be then attempted with success, though corruptions gained ground, in doctrine and practice,

tice, as well as the power of the *Latin Church*, And indeed, those ages produced such a scene of wickedness, violence and corruption, schisms and divisions, elections and depositions, that it was (I think) with very good reason said by *Du Pin*, “ It is no wonder that we have hardly any Monuments of the pastoral vigilance of these Popes, since their whole care was to satisfy their ambition and avarice.” And I should suppose, that any person who had time and patience, to read the tedious account of the Churches of those ages, will rather be tempted to think they had forgot that they had any Scripture at all, than that they would think of the making any sort of alteration in them.

In the twelfth Century appeared the antient *Waldenses* and *Albigenses*, the descendants of whom, seem to be the present Churches of *Piedmont*. These separated themselves from the Church of *Rome*, not that they discovered any faults, or corruptions in the Scripture is evident, from their earnest insisting upon the making those Scriptures their rule.

This was the case in the fourteenth Century, When *Wickliff* here in *England*, *Huss* of *Germany*, and *Jerom* of *Prague*, appeared as lights in the world. Though they were learned and studious men, they found no fault with the Scriptures, but the false doctrines brought in, by corrupt and designing

figning men. From all which evidence and circumstances, I think, the Scriptures appear to be brought down, true and faithfully to the reformation.

5thly. We come now to the Reformation, which began in the first part of the sixteenth Century, and here we find no account, that either *Luther*, or *Calvin*, or any other of those Reformers, ever discovered that the books of the Scriptures had suffered any material alteration, but on the contrary, they esteemed those copies to be true and genuine. And there were at that time, as well as this, great numbers of Copies to compare, and some very ancient Manuscripts which yet remain to be compared with those of a later date, and have been compared by many learned and ingenious men of the several Denominations of Christians, who agree with regard to the truth and purity of the Scriptures, how wide soever they are in other respects. And it is a good argument that even the Church of *Rome* (as corrupt as they are) never altered or corrupted their books or copies of the Scriptures; for if they had, certainly they would have formed them more conformable to their own doctrine and practice. But as the Scriptures were one, and uniform in the first Ages, so they appear to be the same now throughout the World, the *Latin* and *Greek Churches*, the Churches of *Piedmont*,
Lutherans

Lutherans and *Calvinists*, the *Dutch*, the *Kirk of Scotland*, the Church of *England*, and all dissenting Protestants, have all the same books of Holy Scripture, and those containing the same Doctrine, as we find the first Ages had; however they may differ in their understanding of those books.

And with regard to the modern objection, "That there are so many various readings in the many copies of the Scriptures." It has been answered by many learned men, who have nicely examined this affair, that it amounts to no more than what is common to all books, which have been translated into different Languages, and that those various readings are not of Importance to injure the argument of the author, or sense of the text. To which I shall only add, that the common *English* reader may form a good idea, of the nature and importance of those various readings, by comparing the former Translations of our *English* Bible with the present: here we find a great number of various readings indeed, but of what Importance? Not one that injures the text, not one that alters or changes any important doctrine, or duty of the Christian. And finally, I think it adds lustre and credit to the Scriptures, that when the adversaries of Christianity have worked all their artillery, searched every corner for faults, and have suggested frauds, forgeries, &c. they have proved nothing,
nor

nor been able to support the charge in any one material point; but, after all, it harmlessly goes off with suppositions, suggestions, insinuations and may be's.

Seeing then that we have such abundant evidence, that we have received, in the books of the Holy Scriptures, that divine doctrine of life and salvation, which was at first delivered in *Judea* by Jesus Christ and his Apostles; let us not be as children tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive: but stand fast in that form of sound words which was at first delivered unto the Saints.— Let us be thankful to that kind hand of Providence, which hath preserved it down to so late an age.— Let it appear that we are Christians by an orderly walking by the rules of the Gospel, shewing the excellency of the Christian Religion by it's genuine fruits, knowing that it is the council of God, and the doctrine of Jesus Christ, that it is profitable for us, and no cunningly devised fables.

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